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DEPARTMENT FOR S, D, P, SA; NSC FOR MILLARD; CINCPAC FOR
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SUBJECT: DEPUTY SECRETARY VISITS WAR-RAVAGED JAFFNA

Classified By: Ambassador E. Ashley Wills. Reasons 1.5 b, d.

1. (C) Summary: The Deputy Secretary and his delegation visited the Jaffna peninsula for two and a half hours during his one-day visit to Sri Lanka, August 22. The delegation visited a U.S. demining site and a front line position where Sri Lankan army troops and the LTTE face off, and met with four Tamil civic leaders to get their views on the ceasefire. End Summary.

2. (C) Immediately after landing at Colombo's international airport, the Deputy Secretary, his delegation, the Ambassador and an embassy team immediately flew to Jaffna aboard a Sri Lankan Air Force AN-32. After landing at Palaly Air Force Base on Jaffna peninsula, the group transferred to Sri Lankan Air Force Bell helicopters and flew immediately to Chavakatcheri. This small city, formerly with a population of about 80,000, was devastated by artillery and small arms fire from both the Sri Lankan Army and the LTTE in the year 2000. Virtually the entire population departed and subsequently became internally displaced persons (there are 800,000 IDPs in Sri Lanka). The Deputy Secretary's group drove through the devastation enroute to a demining site on Chavakatcheri's outskirts. State's PM Bureau's quick reaction demining force, led by Don Smith, escorted the Deputy Secretary and his delegation around the site and conducted a demonstration of demining techniques. The QRDF has cleared almost 700 mine and UXO from this site in the past three months.

3. (C) The Deputy Secretary and his delegation then flew to a front-line position on the eastern side of the Jaffna peninsula at Muhamalai. The group was shown the Sri Lankan Army's defense perimeter by Commanding Officer General D. Fonseka. The front-line position is about 400 meters from the LTTE's forces and also serves as a crossing point for civilians traveling to and from the Jaffna peninsula.

4. (C) The Deputy Secretary and his delegation flew from Muhamalai into Jaffna thereafter to meet a small group of Tamil civic leaders. The meeting occurred at the home of Jaffna's Catholic Bishop. The Deputy Secretary met with Dr. Ambalavanar, a surgeon; Professor Sitrapalam; a university professor; Ms. Sivachandran, a women's activist; and Mr. Gopalakrishnan, a university student. The Deputy Secretary expressed to the four Tamils the United States's fervent wish for peace in Sri Lanka and asked for their assessment of the situation. He heard from these four activists common themes about the current situation: that the LTTE is the sole representative of the Tamil people; that the LTTE was driven to violence only after more moderate Tamil leaders were doublecrossed by successive governments in Colombo; that the Tamils want peace but only if they are assured a very substantial degree of self rule; and that Tamils want the U.S. to be even-handed. In the latter regard, Dr. Ambalavanar asserted that the U.S. should be an impartial broker between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan Government. The Deputy Secretary politely rejected the assertion, saying that the U.S. strongly supported peace but could not broker a deal because the USG has labeled the LTTE a foreign terrorist organization. He concluded the short meeting by assuring the Tamil activists that the United States sincerely wished for peace, supported the Norwegian efforts at facilitation and was prepared to offer financial assistance for reconstruction of Sri Lanka's northeast once the final peace deal is concluded.

5. (C) At the conclusion of the meeting, the Deputy Secretary was greeted by a gaggle of reporters outside the

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Bishop's residence. He responded to two questions before he and the delegation choppered back to Palaly for their onward flight to Colombo. The remainder of the Deputy Secretary's program has been reported in septels.

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